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ABSTRACT

The effect of receipt of a General Educational Development (GED) certificate during incarceration on former inmates' rates of recidivism was examined by studying a group of 110 individuals who had been incarcerated in the Eastern Ohio Correction Center (EOCC) and were released during fiscal year 1995. Of the 110 individuals, 21 had obtained a GED while at EOCC, 30 participated in GED training but did not complete the program, and 59 did not participate in GED training. Of the 110, the following were classified as maximum risk: 15 of the GED recipients, 17 of the noncompleters, and 34 of the nonparticipants. Rates of recidivism among the three subgroups were determined by monitoring all 110 individuals' files for up to 24 months after their release from EOCC. Of the 21 residents who earned a GED, 6 have been incarcerated for technical violations of probation (a 29% recidivism rate). Only 5 of the maximum risk GED recipients were reincarcerated. No GED completer has committed a new felony offense. Of the 30 GED noncompleters, 9 were incarcerated for technical violations of probation and 2 were incarcerated for new felony offenses--including 8 of the maximum risk group (a 37% recidivism rate). Of the 59 GED nonparticipants, 10 were incarcerated for technical violations of probation and 6 were incarcerated for new felony offenses--15 of whom were maximum risk (a 28% recidivism rate). (The paper contains 20 references. The Wisconsin Risk/Needs Assessment is appended.) (MN)

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ED 416 406

THE IMPACT OF RECEIVING A GENERAL EQUIVELANCY DIPLOMA WHILE INCARCERATED ON THE RATE OF RECIDIVISM

MASTER'S PROJECT

Submitted to the Graduate Education Department of
Franciscan University of Steubenville,
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree
Masters of Science in Education

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem or Research Question

The Eastern Ohio Correction Center (EOCC) is a regional community based correctional facility with minimum security and housing available for up to 75 male felony offenders. Those incarcerated at the facility are referred to as residents. The Eastern Ohio Corrections Center provides judges a sentencing alternative between probation supervision and long-term secure confinement. It is a local alternative to state prison commitments for male, non-violent, low-risk adjudicated felons.

All residents enter into treatment programs that are short-term; highly structured and action-oriented. All residents who enter the facility who have not received a General Equivelance Diploma (GED) or high school diploma are entered into educational training as part of their treatment program. During their period of incarceration, which is no longer than six months, those residents requiring educational training attend daily five hour long classes in preparation for taking the GED test prior to release. On average about half of all residents enter into some degree of educational training, with about half of those students earning a GED prior to being released.

Much time, effort, and resources are spent in preparing these residents to take the GED test as developed by the American Council on Education. Is the time and money spent on educating these convicted felons worth it? I believe obtaining a GED while incarcerated is important for several reasons. First, obtaining a GED should offer greater

opportunities for finding employment and continuing education, which could lead to reducing the likelihood of returning to criminal activity. Secondly, it has been my observation that for many residents receiving their GED is the greatest accomplishment they have ever obtained. This builds self-esteem and self-confidence, which could lead to an overall behavioral change.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this action research project is to extend the range of study of variables of an earlier recidivism study conducted by Shipbaugh (1997) concerning the release of residents in fiscal year 1995. The earlier recidivism study was concerned only with the overall recidivism rate and did not take into consideration completion of educational training or any other factors. This study will compare the recidivism rates of those who earned a GED while incarcerated to those who failed to complete the requirements and those who were not entered into GED training.

Definition of Important Terms

Recidivism: For the purpose of this study, recidivism will be defined as occurring when a former resident of EOCC enters into the custody of any state or federal correctional agency due to a felony conviction. Recidivism will also include a former resident who is entered into the custody of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections due to a violation of probation terms, which may or may not be a felony offense. Sentencing to a county jail due to a probation violation will not be considered as recidivism.

Probation: A sentencing alernative to confinement in a state penitentary. An

offender is found guilty of a felony in a court of law and sentenced to the custody of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, which is suspended in lieu of local control and sanctions, which could include a six month sentence to the Eastern Ohio Correction Center.

Community Based Correctional Facility (CBCF): A sentencing alternative to county common pleas court judges which is between probation and secure confinement in a state correctional institution. The length of confinement cannot exceed six months.

Nonparticipants: In this study a nonparticipant is defined as a resident of EOCC which did not participate in the educational programming due to prior obtainment of a high school diploma or GED.

General Hypothesis

I believe that the recidivism rate for those residents who completed their GED while incarcerated at EOCC will be lower than the recidivism rate of those who were unable to complete the requirements for a GED. Further, I believe the recidivism rate for those who obtained their GED will be equal to or less than the overall recidivism rate for EOCC.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Correctional education has existed since the 1800's. According to Gerber and Fritsh (1993) the early education focused on religious instruction. It was believed the rehabilitative process could be enhanced if the incarcerated offender sought spiritual enlightenment. Today many are questioning the importance of spending limited resources towards the education of convicted criminals. Are the outcomes derived from correctional education programs worth the taxpayer's expense? Does the criminal benefit from these programs? Does society benefit from having an educated convicted felon? To answer these and other questions this literature review will focus on the following areas:

1. What is recidivism?
2. Does receiving a GED, vocational-technical training, or college courses while incarcerated lead to a reduced likelihood of recidivism?
3. Do the resources spent on education benefit society?
4. Is the current data reliable, or does a better methodology need to be created to validate the known research?

One of the main problems facing any research concerning recidivism is determining what constitutes recidivism. There are many different definitions relating to recidivism. Rienerth (1991) found that the concept of recidivism depends on the focus of the research. Some of the dimensions which influence the definitions of recidivism include place of confinement, type of crime, and length of time since released back into society. Recidivism can occur at the arrest stage for new offenses, at the court stage for

convicted offenders, and at the correction stage for those who violate the terms of their parole, or in our case probation.

Since the term recidivism is used as a measuring stick of success or failure of a program, it is imperative that the term be defined and understood. As Rienerth showed there are so many different ways of defining recidivism that comparing the available research is useless if the term is not defined. I believe a national standard for the term as related to research is needed to validate future studies.

Tracey and Steurer (1995) found that the lack of a common definition of recidivism called into suspect the results of various studies conducted across the country on the effectiveness of correctional education programs. Tracey and Steurer gave three measures of recidivism: re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration.

The authors also found that since approximately 1980, many states, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and individual programs have conducted their own studies in an attempt to validate the effectiveness of their educational systems. This is because correctional educators are now forced to prove their worth or face budget reductions by Congress and state legislatures.

The great majority of studies found that education is effective in lowering the rate of recidivism. There is, however little uniformity in either methodology or subject matter, and therefore these studies cannot be said to prove anything about the effectiveness of correctional education as a whole. They also found those studies use different combinations of control and comparison groups, examine different variables, and use different definitions of recidivism and track results by different methods.

The authors of this report brought up good points about the reliability of research involving education's impact on recidivism. Since there are so many variables involved, and since the term recidivism is so hard to define, each report needs close scrutiny to verify its results. Also, with the threat of budget cutbacks, those conducting the research will, for the most part, have a vested interest in the outcome. For this reason all possible biases need to be identified.

Barton and Coley (1996) determined that although the research is less than definitive, a great many studies have established that training and education in prison leads to increased post-release success in the labor force and to reduced recidivism. The authors concluded that the history of corrections has vacillated between rehabilitation and punishment.

The current mood is to devote resources to building more prisons and to strengthen law enforcement and sentencing policies. Within the last 15 years, the U.S. prison population has tripled with about one third of the prisoners being illiterate. Despite the high number of prisoners who are unable to complete a simple literacy test, the budget for education has not kept pace with other areas of corrections spending. The authors found that education had a positive effect on recidivism in 9 of 14 studies the authors reviewed, and 3 of 4 studies showed a positive effect on post-release employment success.

The purpose of this report was to show a need for education in prison. The authors argued that the vast majority of prisoners are released back into society, and it does not serve the needs of society by having them released as illiterate as when they

entered. It was obvious that the authors feel more resources should be allocated to education in prisons. I would tend to agree because a convicted felon who is released into society without an education or some type of skill training has little chance of finding meaningful employment. This article simply reviewed other studies and reported no original findings.

A study was conducted by Flanaghan, et al. (1994) for the Texas State Department of Criminal Justice which reviewed more than 60 studies on prison education and effects of academic and vocational program participation on imate misconduct and reincarceration. The most important findings were as follows:

1. The most common findings among 19 studies of precollege education programs in prison is that inmates exposed to education programs have lower recidivism rates than nonparticipants.

2. Ten studies of prison college programs and post release recidivism showed a strong relationship between college education and reduced recidivism, while four studies showed no relationship.

3. Most of the recent studies of vocational programs in prisons report lower recidivism rates, lower parole revocation rates, better post-release employment patterns, and better institutional disciplinary records for participants compared to nonparticipants.

Despite these findings the authors concluded the most stable predictors of recidivism may be age at first arrest, age upon release, ethnicity, gender, living arrangements, family ties, current income, and history of drug and alcohol abuse. Since these factors are beyond the control of prison educators it may be unrealistic to expect

education to have a substantial effect on recidivism.

The authors of this study bring up a valid question can education have a positive impact on recidivism when so many of the variables concerning the likelihood of repeat criminal activity are outside of the control of educators? It should be noted, however, that the majority of studies would indicate a positive relationship between education and recidivism rates.

Nelson (1995) observed many of the same weaknesses with the available research as earlier discussed; uncontrolled variables and the failure to define recidivism. The author defined recidivism in relation to his study and listed some of the variables that limited the scope of the research. These variables included age, criminal record, intelligence quotient, and post release education and employment. The result of his study showed that the inmates enrolled in college courses at the Montana State Prison for Men had a higher rate of recidivism than those who did not participate. Nelson felt that his broad definition of recidivism and/or the methodology he used might have been a reason for the surprising results.

This was one of the studies that showed a negative effect of education on recidivism rates. It also showed how much impact the definition of recidivism has on the outcome of the study. The author defined recidivism as any return to prison within three years after release for a new offense or parole violation. This broadened the scope due to the length of time and reasons for return. Many studies count recidivism only as a return to the custody of the same agency. So, for example, if a former inmate in Ohio were sentenced and returned to prison in another state, that would not count as recidivism.

This study extended the term to mean any prison in the country. The author also pointed out that the prisoners taking part in the program were those with longer sentences which means they would be considered a higher risk to recidivate due to past criminal history. Those inmates with shorter terms were not there long enough to take advantage of the program.

Cogburn (1986) conducted a research study for the Alabama Department of Corrections on obtaining a GED while incarcerated and the effect it had on recidivism. The study was based on 2,844 inmates who received a GED, high school diploma, or both between 1976-86. The study showed a recidivism rate of 10.2% for those who earned a GED, 10.8% for those who received a high school diploma, and 13.9% for both. The general recidivism rate for the Alabama Department of Corrections between those same years was 34%. This study showed the largest difference in rates between those who received a GED/diploma and those who did not.

On the surface these numbers look very encouraging, but further investigation reveals some flaws with definitions and methodology. Recidivism was defined as returning to prison on a new conviction. This does not take into account parole violations which could involve continued criminal activity.

Further, the data was collected from current Alabama Department of Corrections records. This brings into question the record keeping ability of the department that from 1976-86 was before most of the computer age advancements. It also raises the reliability of the tracking techniques used by the department, the reliability of the method, and the length of time the parolee was tracked. The study did not provide any reliability

information.

I believe the New York State Department of Correctional Services (1989) conducted a better study. This study compared the rate of return to correctional facilities of those inmates who completed their GED while incarcerated. This study extended the range of study of variables of a report conducted in 1983. The purpose of the study was to determine if the acquisition of a High School Equivalency Diploma while incarcerated related to the likelihood of return to the departments' custody following release. The study covered inmates released in 1986-87 with a follow up period of 17 – 42 months.

The findings of the research showed that the recidivism rate for those inmates who completed their GED was 34% compared to 39.1% who did not earn a GED while incarcerated. The report concluded that the difference in the return rates were statistically significant and cannot be attributed to chance but to a real difference between the return rates of GED and non GED cases. A chi-square test was used to determine that the lower rate of return was significant ($p<.001$). According to the report, from a statistical perspective, a difference this large would occur by chance alone in only 1 out of 1,000 times.

I believe the findings in this report to be more realistic than the Alabama study due to better methodology. The report was able to provide information on the reliability of the data that was collected and studied. The department tracked over 15,000 inmates over the time frame of the study. The difference of 5% seems much more likely than the 23% difference found in the Alabama study.

Jenkins, Steurer, and Pendry (1995) tracked 120 inmates released from the

Maryland penal system who had completed correctional education programs during the period of 1989-90. They obtained their information through post release interviews with parole officers who were responsible for tracking the released inmates. Those inmates who were released by court order or were released as a result of expiration of sentence were excluded from the study because of the difficulty of tracking their post release experience. They included a number of demographic and criminal justice variables to include age, sex, race, sentence length, and type of offense. The 120 parolees in the study group were determined to be similar to the 19,014 releasees in the general population in the areas of sentence length and the violent nature of their offenses.

The central finding of the study was that educational attainment while in prison does make a difference to incarcerated adults when they return to their communities. The study also found that educational attainment is positively related to success in obtaining employment, the type of employment obtained and the hourly wages earned, and successful completion of community sanctions. Inmates who complete a high school equivalency or college program are more likely to earn a higher hourly wage than those inmates who complete an adult basic education or vocational program.

The authors admit that this was a modest and limited study. The results of this study show a need for on-going and more systematic research. There was no statistical reliability shown in the study nor was a comparison group of non-completers shown. The study was more concerned with post release success of the parolee, and little information was provided on the rate of recidivism. One positive point showed was that completion of a major correctional education program such as obtaining a GED does have a positive

relationship to post release success.

The authors reported that the cost of educating an inmate for a year is approximately $2,500, while the average cost of incarcerating an inmate for a year is nearly $19,000. The authors argue that the result of this study, though limited and in need of further research, would seem to indicate that inmates return to prison at a substantially lower rate having completed an educational program, which would confirm the cost effectiveness of correctional education programming. I feel more in depth research using statistical analysis is necessary before the term substantially lower rate should be used when referring to recidivism rates in this study.

Clare (1996) conducted a study of inmates who completed high school equivalency, vocational technical training, or college associate degree programs at the Garrett Heyns Education Center, Washington Correctional Center at Shelton, Washington. The results of the study were similar to the findings in Alabama. The average recidivism rate for Garrett Heyns graduates was 13.9% compared to 30.9% statewide.

> Recidivism as defined by the Washington State Department of Corrections is: the return to a Washington State adult correctional facility of an offender who had either been paroled or discharged from such a facility. Returns can be the result of new felony convictions or technical violations of parole conditions. Subsequent commitments to other correctional jurisdictions are not accounted for, nor are returns beyond five years at-risk (p. 31-32).

I would consider the findings of this study to be more reliable than the Alabama study because of the way the data was collected. The Department of Corrections used the electronic Offender Based Tracking System in order to discover which individuals released between 1985 and 1991 had recidivated according to the above definition. The general population for the study was the 20,472 inmates released during that time frame.

According to Clare the average cost of incarceration in the state of Washington is $25,000 a year. Approximately 4% of prison budgets are allocated to provide correctional education. The author showed that hundreds of individuals spending many fewer years in institutions result in many millions of dollars in savings. He also pointed out other benefits such as decreased welfare costs, lower property losses, salvaged family units, and reduced pain and suffering by those who would otherwise be victims. One additional advantage, to which Clare did not refer, is an increased tax base from those inmates who find employment after being released. If accurate, this would justify spending precious funds on education since it returns millions of dollars in savings.

Hackman (1997) concluded that in this time of getting tough on crime one thing is often overlooked: education works. Today taxpayers are concerned about tax dollars spent on educating inmates while most do not realize that every dollar spent on education is returned in public safety, employment, and recidivism reduction. Education is an opportunity for the offender to improve his lifestyle and turn a bad experience (incarceration) into a positive experience (rehabilitation). Hackman feels one of the main benefits of educating inmates is when they realize that they have the capability to succeed which allows them to re-enter into society with an improved outlook and attitude.

During the 1980's the amount of people incarcerated doubled. According to Imel (1990) there were several factors for this increase:

- There was more crime due to the large increase in the number of 18-25 years olds in the population, the most crime prone ages.
- A tougher stance on punishment meant that more criminals were sentenced to prison.
- Because younger criminals commit more violent crimes, the sentence tended to be for longer terms.
- More severe sentences were handed out for certain types of offenses such as drug and repeat offenses.

The amount of people incarceated in America continues to climb every year. Currently about 90% of all correctional institutions offer some type of educational program. Imel discovered that it is difficult to demonstrate if educational programs have a positive relationship on the rate of recidivism because of the large number of problems that impedes the validity and reliability of the research. However, there have been studies that have documented positive relationships between inmates' participation in vocational education and subsequent employment upon release that could decrease the likelihood recidivism.

It is a clear trend that the number of people incarcerated in this country will continue to rise in the future. The number of new prisons built each year will also steadily increase in the future. It is encouraging that 90% of all prisons offer some type of educational programming. But, due to limited resources, only a fraction of the number of inmates who could benefit from education are enrolled in a program.

One of the biggest trends in the American courts today is to treat juvenile

offenders as adults in criminal proceedings, and not just when a violent crime has been committed. As a result more and more juveniles are serving their time in adult facilities. Ayers (1997) reported that a child who is sentenced as an adult is far more likely to recidivate than is a juvenile offender who is supervised in juvenile courts. A juvenile in an adult prison is also more likely to be physically assualted and preyed upon sexually which leads to more physical and emotional problems upon release.

With more juveniles serving their sentences in adult prisons it is more important than ever to have solid educational programming available. These young offenders are, for the most part released back into society at a young age and they need some type of skill or educational background if they are to have a chance of succeding in society.

According to Lewis (1994) the universal opinions of the best minds in the field of corrections is that education in prisons and jails, does work to lower recidivism. Further benfits of education include making the prison a more humane enviornment and a more tolerable place to live and work. Education works to lower the cost of incarceration and to lower the burden on all taxpayers. Finaly Lewis found that education leads to habilitation of offenders and allows for a greater chance of post release success.

The main point of Lewis' article was the right kind of education was needed to to reach the above accomplishments. The right kind of education includes educating correctional staff and the general public on the importance of education. Lewis did not provide many suggestions for achieving such a successful program. He also did not provide information on how he came to his conclusion on how beneficial correctional education can be. After researching this topic I feel there are many studies which would

confirm the opinions of Lewis on the importance of correctional education.

The majority of the literature available on this topic would lead one to believe that education reduces recidivism, increases employment opportunities, builds self-esteem, and increases the likelihood of post release success. It should be noted that most of the literature is written by researchers within the correctional education profession which could lead to bias. Also, there are so many variables involved with determining the impact education has on recidivism rates that each individual study must be closely scrutinized to determine reliability and validity. Results could vary from one study to another simply because of the lack of a clear-cut definition of recidivism.

Hackett (1992) found that "if the convicted felon receives little or no education or training while incarcerated, he or she will likely return to criminal activities upon rlease. This is where the insidious recidivism cycle begins: another bothched crime, another arrest, another conviction, and another sentence at incalculable cost to the taxpayer" (p. 5).

This article was concerned primarily with vocational training, and it found that vocational and technical training enhances employability, self-esteem, and opportunities for further education of former offenders. I would assume the same could be said about GED programming based on findings of similar studies.

If the majority of research conducted is accurate, the education has proven to be extremely beneficial to the inmate and to society. The cost of education is negligible when compared to the cost of incarceration. Since the most research does show a positive relationship between education and recidivism rates, education programs have

proven to be a cost-effective way of reducing prison overcrowding.

The Eastern Ohio Correction Center Education Department falls under the control of the Ohio Central School System which, according to the Ohio State Legislative Office *of Education Oversight (LOEO), (1994), operates in all but one correctional facility in* the State of Ohio. LOEO reported that of the 21,000 inmates who entered the Ohio prison system in 1992:

- 75% did not have a high school diploma or its equivalent
- 40% read below a sixth-grade level
- 60-80% had no marketable job skills (p.10).

It is statistics like the above that underscore the importance of education in a correctional setting. Assuming the vast majority of the above inmates will be released back into society, it is important to improve these numbers while the offender is incarcerated. LOEO listed the recidivism rate for Ohio in 1993 as 41%, compared to national figures, which range from 35-62%. LOEO concluded that research would indicate that for some inmates, education could play a vital role in the rehabilitative process. But, LOEO also advised that care should be taken when comparing recidivism rates because studies define and measure recidivism differently.

LOEO conducted telephone interviews with inmates, and according to this study, inmates reported that education had changed their attitudes towards themselves and their futures, and provided job skills. LOEO did not provide any validity or reliability information concerning how this response was determined or on how the telephone interviews were conducted. For these reasons this finding can not be considered as valid or reliable.

LOEO conducted an examination of 13 recidivism studies, and determined that the research literature does not assert that it is prison education alone that affects whether an inmate will return to prison. Furthermore, the studies that attempted to prove cause and effect concluded that prison education is one of many factors that influence recidivism. Other factors associated with recidivism include an individual's motivation, participation in other prison programs, level of family and community support, prior incarceration, and employment, criminal, and psychological histories.

The recidivism study also found that completion of an education program, not merely participation is related to less recidivism. According to the research the milestone of completion of the program tends to make the difference between post-release success and failure. Another interesting finding of the research was that the length of prison stay does not necessarily affect the likelihood of recidivism.

The LOEO findings are important for several reasons, the most important of which is the results were used to determine the funding of correctional education in the state of Ohio. Therefore, the findings had a direct impact on the funding of the EOCC Educational Department. As a result of this study, LOEO recommended the State Legislature increase the funding for education. LOEO also recommended that the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections continue to provide the full range of education opportunities to meet the full range of inmate needs. The focus should be on program completion, not merely participation.

Platt, Bohac, and Barnes (1993) contend that the biggest obstacle facing correctional educators today is lack of resources. The authors conclude that state

legislators put high emphasis on funding public schools and health care and little emphasis on programs aimed to increase inmates education and employability.

According to Platt, Bohac, and Barnes lawmakers must be convinced that investing in correctional education reverses the probability of recidivism. The authors refer to studies that have demonstrated positive effects on the rate of recidivism, which demonstrates the ability of ex-offenders to stay in society as taxpayers, which reduces the amount of money needed for prisons.

Since the majority of research is conducted by professionals within the field of education that have a vested interest in the findings, because of funding needs, attention must be paid to the bias of the researchers. As Platt, Bohac, and Barnes reported correctional educators must prove their worth because of competition for limited resources.

I believe this study will show a positive relationship between obtaining a GED and reduced rates of recidivism involving former residents of the Eastern Ohio Correction Center. However, it should be noted that the education received would not be the whole reason for the reduction of recidivism. There are other factors that are outside of the control of educators that will impact the findings. Receiving a GED will be one of several factors, which will lead to a reduced recidivism rate.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Type of Design

I will use an action, descriptive design for this research project. It will consist of researching resident files and a previous recidivism study to determine recidivism rates of three target groups.

Participants

The participants in this project will consist of those residents who were incarcerated and successfully completed programming at EOCC during fiscal year 1995. Those who did not successfully complete programming were not included in this study. The fiscal year ran from 01 July 1994 to 30 June 1995. The recidivism study was completed in July 1997 allowing for a follow up period of at least 24 months. There were 112 residents who successfully completed the program during fiscal year 1995, of which two have passed away, giving a total of 110 participants for this study.

All of the 110 residents were on probation during their incarceration at EOCC and upon release. The terms and length of probation vary by each resident. The residents will be labeled as GED recipients, GED non-recipients, or non-participants. Each of the 110 former residents will be studied to determine which group they belong to and if they recidivated. The time frame for this study ranges from July 1994 to July 1997.

Apparatus

I will be reviewing the files of all 110 residents that are participants in this

research study. Reliability of the files were determined during an audit conducted by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections which found 100% compliance with department procedures.

Procedure

All ethical considerations of the American Psychological Association (1992) will be followed during this research project. Permission to study the files was granted by the Executive Director of the Eastern Ohio Correction Center. The former residents are not aware of this study and, they will not be contacted in person. The reviewing of files will determine to which of the groups a resident will belong. The data concerning recidivism was collected for the recidivism study through the various county adult probation departments that were responsible for post release supervision of the 110 participants in this study.

There are some error variables that need to be considered during this study. The environment to which the resident returns may have a great impact on the likelihood of recidivism. It needs to be noted that the residents who are to be studied come from varied backgrounds. The majority were sentenced from East Central Ohio counties that are considered to be part of Appalachia. There were also residents sentenced to EOCC from Lorain County that is a suburb of Cleveland. Most of these residents were inner city minorities. I plan to make this error variable a variable of interest, and will compare the recidivism rates of the residents from an inner city environment to the residents from a rural environment. This will show the effect that environment has on recidivism.

Other error variables include family support, economics, personality, drug and

alcohol abuse, and religious affiliations. It can be assumed through the checking of files that the group involved in this study will be similar to other groups involved in past recidivism studies, which will partially eliminate these concerns.

Operationally Defined Hypothesis or Research Question

This study will show that obtaining a GED while incarcerated at the Eastern Ohio Correction Center will reduce the likelihood of recidivism, as measured by resident files from fiscal year 1995 and a 1997 EOCC recidivism study. The recidivism rate of those who completed their GED will be lower than the rate of those who were unable to complete the requirements. Further, the recidivism rate for GED recipients will be equal to or less than the recidivism rate of the non-participants. The education received during incarceration will be one of several factors leading to the reduction in recidivism.

Chapter 4

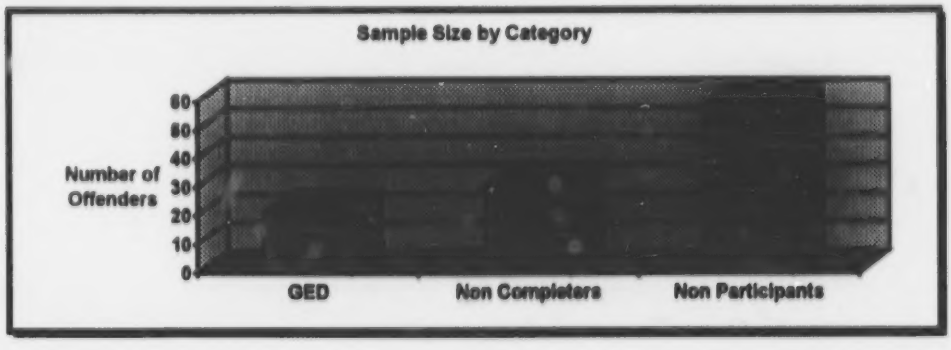
RESULTS

The purpose of this research study is to extend the range of study of variables of an earlier recidivism study conducted by the Eastern Ohio Correction Center. The original study was compiled by Joseph Shipbaugh and reported in the Eastern Ohio Correction Center FY97 Annual Report. The information regarding offender recidivism was received from the Probation Departments responsible for post release supervision.

The recidivism study was conducted in 1997 and focused on offenders released during fiscal year 1995. The fiscal year ran from 01 July 94 to 30 June 95. The study focused on the 112 offenders who successfully completed programming at EOCC. The primary focus of the study was to measure the number of offenders who have been incarcerated in a state prison for a new felony offense. The secondary focal point was to examine the number of offenders incarcerated for technical violations of probation terms.

This study focused on the possible impact education may have on recidivism. The population size for this study is 110 due to the deaths of two released offenders. Those 110 released offenders were categorized in one of three groups: GED Recipients, Non-completers, and Non-participants. The population size for each category is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1



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The overall recidivism rate for those released from the Eastern Ohio Correction Center for FY95 was 29%. Those incarcerated for committing a new felony was only 7%. Of the 33 former residents who were returned to a state prison, eight committed new felonies and 25 were sentenced on a technical violation of probation.

To conduct the study, The Wisconsin Standardized Risk/Needs Assessment Instrument was used (see appendix A). The purpose of the instrument is to categorize offenders as maximum risk, medium risk and minimum risk to recidivate. This instrument is widely used and accepted as being reliable and valid.

A numerical score was given to each resident based on a series of questions relating to past criminal behavior, employment history, previous drug/alcohol abuse, probation supervision, etc. The following scores determined the classifications: 0-8 minimum risk, 9-16 medium risk, 17+ maximum risk. It is important to note that the individual offenders were not available during data collection to assist in the deciphering of any questionable areas of criminal history or social data.

Of the original 112 released offenders 67 were classified as maximum risk, 33 as medium risk, and 12 as minimum risk. It would appear the reliability of the instrument was further validated when the results of the study were reviewed. Of the 33 offenders who returned to state prison, 28 were classified as maximum risk, five as medium, and no minimum risk offender's recidivated.

The original study provided vital information as to the rate of recidivism and the classification of offenders. This study extended the range of study of variables by focusing on the following areas

1. The rate of recidivism for GED recipients, Non-completers, and Non-participants.

2. The possible impact of environment by studying urban and rural recidivism rates.

3. The possible impact of completing educational programming by focusing on the recidivism rates of maximum risk offenders.

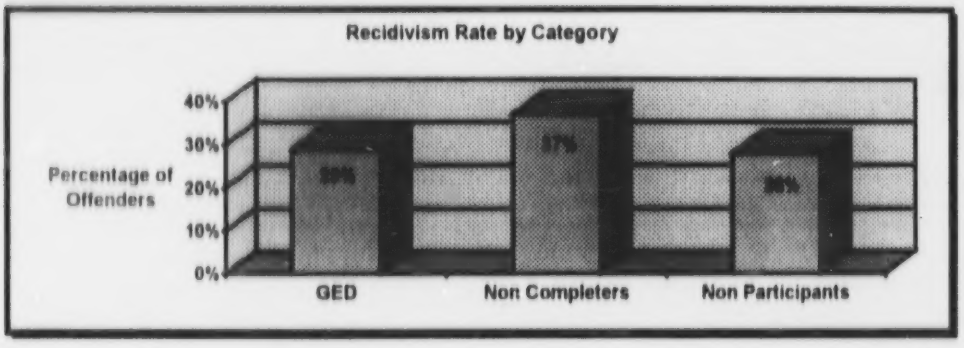
To determine classification of offenders all resident files from fiscal year 1995 were reviewed to determine who earned a GED (GED Recipients), who entered educational programming but failed to complete the requirements for a GED (Non-completers), and those who were not entered into educational programming due to previously receiving a high school diploma or GED (Non-participants). For a breakdown of the three categories refer to Figure 1.

Of the 21 residents who earned a GED six have been incarcerated on technical violations of probation. No member of the GED population group committed a new felony offense. The recidivism rate for the GED group is 29%.

The Non-completer group consisted of 30 former residents, of which nine were incarcerated for technical violations of probation. Two members of this group were incarcerated on new felony offenses for a total of 11 offenders who recidivated.. The recidivism rate for the Non-completers is 37%.

The largest group was the non-participants, which consisted of 59 former residents. This group was responsible for ten technical violations of probation, and six new felony offenses for a total of 16 recidivists. The recidivism rate for the Non-participants is 28%.

Figure 2



One factor that is considered is the environment to which the offender returns to after incarceration. Urban areas generally have higher recidivism rates than rural. Further research was conducted to determine if receiving a GED might have some impact on the rate of recidivism in urban and rural areas. Of the 11 counties that sentenced offenders to the Eastern Ohio Correction Center nine are considered rural and two are considered urban.

Table 1

Recidivism Rate by County

County	Total Offenders	Total Recidivists	Percentage
Columbiana	36	11	31%
Lorain**	22	11	50%
Jefferson	20	3	15%
Harrison	9	2	23%
Guernsey	9	1	12%
Tuscarawas	5	1	20%
Trumbull**	3	2	67%
Coshocton	3	1	34%
Carroll	1	1	100%
Muskingum	1	0	0%
Belmont	1	0	0%

** Urban County

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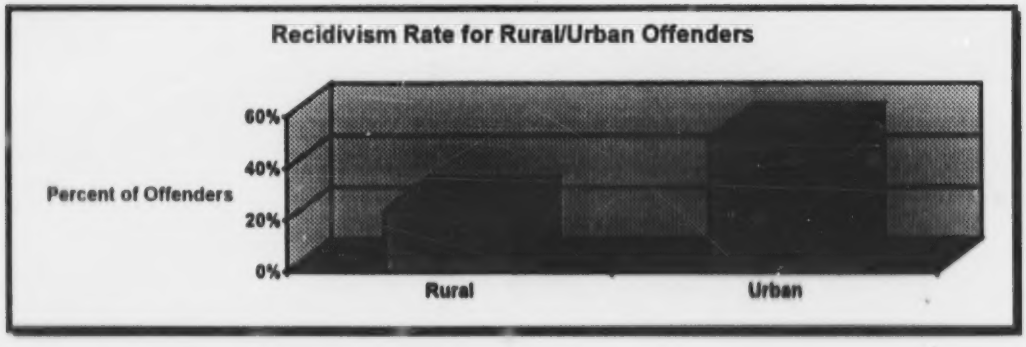
The rural counties sentenced 85 offenders to the EOCC, which accounted for 77% of the population. The urban counties sentenced 25 offenders or 23% of the population. Despite only accounting for 23% of the population, the urban areas accounted for 40% of the recidivism. Of the 25 offenders sentenced by urban jurisdictions, 13 recidivated. Of the 85 rural offenders, 20 recidivated. The rate of recidivism for urban offenders was 52% compared to 24% for rural offenders.

It is hard to determine what effect, if any, obtaining a GED would have on this group because only three of the 25 members received a GED. Of those three, two recidivated. Non-completers consisted of eight urban members, of which four recidivated. Non-participants had 14 urban members with seven recidivating. Although the numbers appear to be consistent, the size of the population is small and these results must be considered inconclusive.

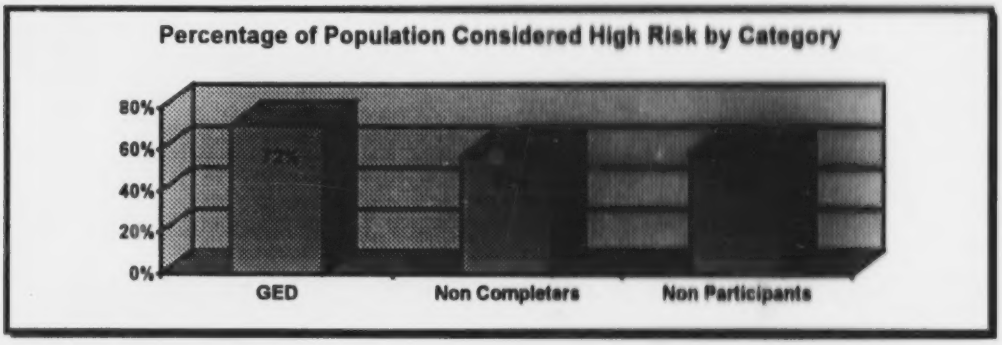
Figure 3



The final focus point of this study was to see if obtaining a GED could impact recidivism by studying the group most likely to recidivate. Of the 21 residents who received a GED 15 were classified as maximum risk. Of those 15 maximum risk

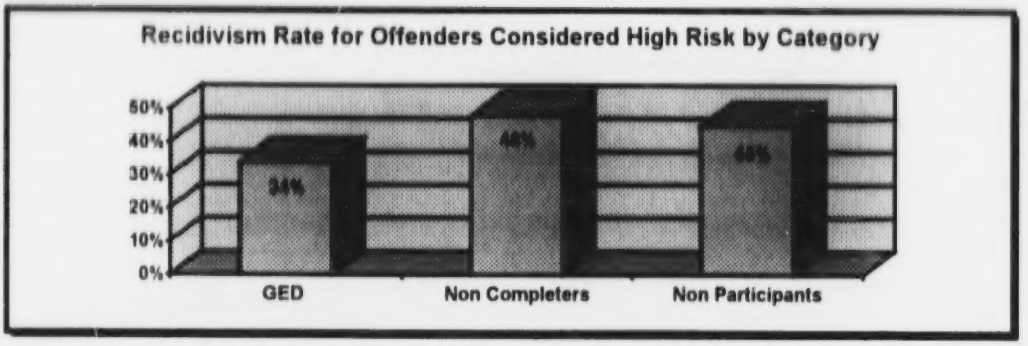
offenders five recidivated. The Non-completers consisted of 17 maximum risk offenders, of which eight recidivated. The Non-participants consisted of 34 maximum risk offenders with 15 recidivating.

Figure 4



These findings are probably the most important of the study because despite having the highest percentage of maximum offenders, the GED group had the lowest percentage of maximum offender recidivism. Maximum offenders consisted of 72% of the GED population, but the recidivism rate for this group was only 34%. When compared to the other two groups these percentages take on added significance. Maximum risk offenders consisted of only 57% of the Non-completers group with a recidivism rate of 48%. The Non-participants consisted of 58% maximum risk offenders with 45% recidivating.

Figure 5



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Chapter 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The research for this project focused on the impact obtaining a GED may have on three areas of interest:

1. The rate of recidivism for GED recipients, Non-completers, and Non-participants.
2. Returning to an urban or rural environment after incarceration.
3. The rate of recidivism for maximum risk offenders.

The hypothesis for this project was that those residents who obtained a GED would recidivate at a rate lower than Non-completers and equal to or lower than Non-participants. When reviewing the results it would appear as if the hypothesis was correct. The Non-completers group had the highest recidivism rate with 37% of the group returning to the custody of the Department of Corrections. The GED recipient group had a 29% recidivism rate compared to 28% for Non-participants. On the surface this appears to justify the hypothesis, but with further investigation these numbers take on added significance.

The Non-participant group had a lower recidivism rate than the GED recipients, but it also had a much lower percentage of maximum risk offenders. The GED recipient group was comprised of 72% maximum risk offenders, while the Non-participant group had only 58% maximum risk offenders. This would indicate that even though the group of GED recipients was comprised of more maximum risk offenders, the recidivism rate compared to the Non-participant group was just about equal.

When comparing the GED recipient group to the Non-completers it is obvious that those who received their GED faired better at post-release success. The Non-completers had the lowest percentage of maximum risk offenders (57%) but the highest rate of recidivism. This would seem to validate the theory that it is more important to complete the educational program than to simply participate.

This project was unable to determine if obtaining a GED affected the recidivism rate for those who return to an urban environment because only three urban offenders completed a GED. However, when comparing urban and rural offenders it is obvious that environment plays a major role in an offender's likelihood of post release success. The recidivism rate for urban offenders was 52% compared to only 24% for rural offenders. It is also important to note that even though only two of the 11 counties were considered urban, 50% of the new felony convictions were from urban areas. The percentage of new felony offenders was 16% compared to only 0.5% for rural offenders.

The most important finding of this project was the positive impact obtaining a GED had on maximum risk offenders. As earlier noted, the GED recipient group had the highest percentage of maximum risk offenders and the lowest percentage of maximum risk offender recidivism. When comparing the three groups the GED recipient group faired much better on post release success. The recidivism rate for the GED recipient group was 34% compared to 45% for the Non-participants and 49% for the Non-completers. Since the maximum risk group is the most likely to recidivate it is important to track this population. With 14% less recidivism than the Non-completers, it is highly likely that the GED recipient group benefited from completing their educational

programming.

Conclusion

Upon reviewing the findings of this project it can be stated that the hypothesis was correct, and it would appear that obtaining a GED had some impact on these results.

When reviewing the results of the three areas of focus there are some important considerations that must be taken into account. First, even though the Non-participant group had the lowest overall recidivism rate, the GED recipient group had by far a higher percentage of maximum risk offenders. When comparing the two groups and considering the percentages of maximum risk offenders, it would appear the GED recipient group had a better rate of post release success, despite the slightly higher overall rate of recidivism.

Second, the high rate of urban recidivism can be linked to many factors. It has been my experience that urban county probation departments and courts are less tolerable on technical violations of probation than are their rural counterparts.

There are several reasons for the urban and rural differences, some of them include greater numbers of people on probation that limits the probation officers' ability to have a more personal relationship with their probationers. Often an urban offender may have probation revoked for an offense that may have only received a verbal warning from a rural county probation officer. Another reason is the fact that the risk to probation officers is greater in urban counties, leading to a more para-military mentality. An urban environment offers more opportunity for recidivism with the availability of drugs and gang activity. This is not to say that rural environments are free of these problems, but it is much more prevalent in urban communities. Because of the population size it is

impossible to determine if obtaining a GED has any impact on post release success in an urban environment. Two of the three urban offenders who received their GED did recidivate. It can be concluded however that with over half of the residents from urban area recidivating that environment does play a major role in the likelihood of recidivism.

Finally, I believe the most important finding of this research, limited though it was, is the impact receiving a GED apparently has on maximum risk offenders. The fact that the GED recipient group had by far the highest percentage of maximum risk offenders, yet the lowest rate of maximum risk recidivism is an important finding. The maximum risk group members are the ones who need the most help and support to ensure post release success. It can be argued that receiving a GED can greatly affect a maximum risk offender's ability to successfully complete probation.

Implications

It would appear that receiving a quality education while incarcerated at the Eastern Ohio Correction Center could positively impact an offender's likelihood of recidivating. As a result there are several major considerations which must be made when determining programming for the residents of the EOCC.

First, it is clear from this and other findings that it is more important to complete an educational program than to just participate. Local judges and probation departments must consider this when considering sentencing and early release. Since the maximum sentence a court can impose is only six months, it is imperative that the resident has a chance to complete the program. Early release is often granted at four months; this two-month period could be the difference between earning a GED and not completing the

educational program. Based on these findings and other similar studies, judges should consider not offering early release to a resident who is still in educational training.

Second, the Eastern Ohio Correction Center should establish some type of after-care programming for residents who are released who did not earn their GED. This could include continuing to offer educational assistance until the former resident is able to successfully earn his GED. This would be court imposed and made a part of the offender's terms of probation. Although this would increase the cost of post release supervision, the cost would be more than made up by a lowered rate of recidivism and making the former offender a successful member of society rather than a continuous societal burden.

This research has indicated the positive affects of obtaining a GED on maximum risk offenders. As a result, when designing programming for maximum risk offenders, thoughtful consideration must be given the importance of successfully completing the educational programming. This could mean adjusting the schedules of maximum risk offenders to ensure they have ample opportunity to earn their GED. One way could be by reducing their work assignments and lengthening the time they have to study.

Finally, it is clear that receiving a GED is an important factor when considering post release success. Further funding is needed to allow for additional teachers so that the teacher/student ratio can be reduced. With limited sentencing time available it is imperative that each resident in educational programming receives the most individual attention possible. Additional teachers would allow for greater per student learning time because they would not be competing for a teacher's attention. Students go at their own

pace which further increases the need for more full time teachers. The results of this and other recidivism studies would seem to justify the additional cost of hiring teachers based on improved chances of post release success.

Recommendations

Alhough this was a limited study, the results would seem to be the same as the majority of recidivism studies involving education, that education does have a positive impact on recidivism. The findings would also justify further research in this area, to include annual recidivism studies.

Since fiscal year 1995 there have been several changes that have occurred which could affect future recidivism studies. The first is the construction of a new classroom, learning lab, and educational offices which has greatly improved the teachers' ability to teach, and more importantly the residents' ability to learn. Prior to this construction project GED classes were held in the cafeteria which was not conducive to learning. There were constant interruptions and students did not have the privacy needed to do their work. Since the new classroom and learning lab were constructed the student has more opportunity to complete his assigned tasks and to become better prepared to take and pass the GED test.

The Eastern Ohio Correction Center has undergone a major expansion since fiscal year 1995, which has allowed for the capacity of the resident population to double. The number of offenders sentenced from our member counties has dramatically increased, as a result, the EOCC no longer takes offenders from Lorain County. The population now consists of almost 100% rural offenders. In fiscal year 1995 Belmont

County had only one offender successfully complete the program; today Belmont County is by far the largest supplier of offenders to EOCC. With such a dramatic change of population, future recidivism studies may show different results.

During this same period the sentencing laws in the State of Ohio have changed with the passing of Senate Bill 2 in 1996, giving judges the opportunity to sentence more violent offenders to the EOCC. As a result the population today would almost assuredly consist of a higher percentage of maximum risk offenders. It is important to consider the impact this study showed receiving a GED has on maximum risk offenders and to closely monitor their progression towards receiving a GED.

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RISK ASSESSMENT

File ____ of ____

CLIENT NAME _____ CASE NUMBER ____ ____
Last First MI

OFFICER _____ UNIT LOCATION ____ ____
Last Social Security Number

DATE

ARRESTED WITHIN (5) YEARS PRIOR TO ARREST FOR CURRENT OFFENSES (exclude traffic):

0 No 4 Yes

NUMBER OF PRIOR ADULT INCARCERATIONS IN A STATE OR FEDERAL INSTITUTION:

0 0 3 1 - 2 6 3 and above

NUMBER OF PRIOR ADULT PROBATION/PAROLE SUPERVISIONS

0 None 4 One or more

NUMBER OF PRIOR PROBATION/PAROLE REVOCATIONS RESULTING IN IMPRISONMENT (Adult or Juvenile):

0 None 4 One or more

AMOUNT OF TIME EMPLOYED IN LAST 12 MONTHS:

0 More than 7 months 1 5 to 7 months 2 Less than 5 months 0 Not applicable

NUMBER OF PRIOR FELONY CONVICTIONS (or Juvenile Adjudications)

0 None 2 One 4 Two or more

0 None 3 One 6 Two or more 7 Three or more

AGE AT ARREST LEADING TO FIRST FELONY CONVICTION: (or Juvenile Adjudication)

0 24 and over 2 20 - 23 4 19 and under

AGE AT ADMISSION TO INSTITUTION OR PROBATION FOR CURRENT OFFENSE:

0 30 and over 3 18 - 29 6 17 and under

0 30 and over 4 18 - 29 7 17 and under

RATE THE FOLLOWING BASED ON PERIOD SINCE LAST RE)ASSESSMENT

ALCOHOL USAGE PROBLEMS

0 N° interference with functioning 2 Occasional abuse; some disruption of functioning 4 Frequent abuse; serious disruption needs treatment

0 o interference with functioning 2 Occasional abuse; some disruption of functioning 3 Frequent abuse; serious disruption needs treatment

OTHER DRUG USAGE PROBLEMS

0 No interference with functioning 2 Occasional abuse; some disruption of functioning 4 Frequent abuse; serious disruption; needs treatment

0 No interference with functioning 1 Occasional abuse; some disruption of functioning 2 Frequent abuse; serious disruption; needs treatment

ASSOCIATIONS

0 Mainly with non-criminally oriented individuals 5 Mainly with negative individuals

TYPE OF ARRESTS (indicate most serious, excluding traffic)

0 None 2 Technical PV only 4 Misdemeanor arrest (s) 8 Felony arrest

ATTITUDE

0 No adverse difficulties/motivated to change 2 Periodic difficulties/ uncooperative/dependent 5 Frequent hostile/ negative/criminal orientation

Scale: Max - 17 and above
Med - 9-16
Min - 8 and below

TOTAL

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